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ABSTRACT

Participant observation and author introspection were used to collect data in this study of nonverbal communication among Italian Americans in three large American cities. Discussion is given to kinesics (gestures and signs), haptics (touch), proxemics (interiors of homes, exteriors of homes, and spatial arrangements at a wedding dinner), and objectics (the display of photographs, jewelry, and money). By its distinctive functioning on the nonverbal level, it was observed that Italian Americans have identified themselves as a separate subculture. (HOD)

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NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION AMONG ITALIAN AMERICANS

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Abstract: After World War I, a period of intense nationalism, the existence of other cultures and languages was viewed as a threat to the United States. The "melting pot" concept fostered a monolingual approach to education and a monocultural approach to life. The immigrant was to give up her/his linguistic symbol system as a price for acceptance and citizenship. Therefore, many second and third generation Americans lost the languages of the countries of their origin. These people, however, retained a "way of life." The purpose of this naturalistic study is to examine the nonverbal symbol systems utilized by the Italian American subculture which give meaning and identity to this group.

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NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION AMONG ITALIAN AMERICANS

While a common or mass communication system of symbols has increasingly dominated the North American consciousness, distinct and significant minority subcultures continue to exert a power influence upon everyday communicative interactions. Italian Americans---strongly influenced by their close ties to the nuclear and extended family as well as their origins with the Italian culture---function as a relatively discrete but powerful symbol-using culture in the United States.(1) And many of these people retain direct use of subculture symbols which affect personal, social, religious and family day-to-day experiences.

For this study, participant observation and recall (author introspection) were the techniques used to collect data. The information was unsolicited, spontaneous and selectively perceived, and it provided the basis from which the categorization and signification of the nonverbal patterns of the Italian American were inferred. Three traditional Italian American neighborhoods were the areas observed, using four message systems: kinesics, objectics, haptics and proxemics.

Italian American writers begin the history of the Italian in America with its "discovery" by Columbus in 1492. However, until the 1870's there were, perhaps, only fifty thousand Italians in the United States. In the 1870's and continuing for two decades, nearly five million Italians left unemployment, low salaries, poor medical care, no schooling, rigid class structure and exploitation, and semi-starvation in Italy for other countries. Of that number, it is estimated that one in four came to the United States. Between 1900 and 1920, another ten million left Italy.(2)

Many of the Italian American immigrants settled in the northeastern part of the United States. Carl Cecora, the former President of the Italian American Civil Rights League, estimates that one third of all Italian Americans now live in New York State, another third live in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Connecticut and New Jersey.(3) This would leave the remaining third distributed in places like Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Miami.

This study covers observations in three cities: Providence, Boston and Philadelphia. Each city has its specific area which is heavily, if not exclusively, populated by Italian Americans. In Providence, it is Federal Hill, or, as natives refer to it, "The Hill"; in Boston, it is the North End; in Philadelphia, it is "South Philly". It was to those areas the Italian immigrant came, for her/his compatriots were located there.

The writer's period of contact was from childhood to twenty years of age for Providence. The period of contact for Boston was five years. And the period of contact was three years for Philadelphia. Throughout the years, there was no definitive period of absence from these sources of information due to the proximity of the cities observed.

Basically, the economic level of the observed people varied little from city to city, for, as with most subcultures, one may find in the specific area blue collar, white collar and professional workers in the nuclear and extended family units. The educational level was fairly predictable: grade school drop-cuts, high school graduates, college and professional school graduates. In these specific areas were the poor and the wealthy, the literate and the illiterate sharing life experiences. And, most important, these people were establishing an ethnicity---through the use of shared symbols---which may be called the Italian American subculture. All Italian

Americans did not share all of the recorded nonverbal patterns of behavior-- social class, age and ethnic identification affected the appearance or non-appearance of these traits. However, a commonness articulates itself and allows one to infer the presence of a definite ethnicity.

Nationalist factions claim that a changing of the linguistic symbol system will result in a loss of identity or culture; however, a culture does not preserve itself "...predominantly through the conventional use of speech symbols."(4) That language is a major communication system or that a sub-culture may have a linguistic identity will, of course, not be denied. But, in addition to this particular system of communication, one must add the above-mentioned systems as means of identifying ethnic groups.

Ethnicity may be preserved through nonverbal communication systems which create social meanings for the members of a group and perpetuate a unique identity. And that will be the focus of this study---the nonverbal communication interactions that have created and given identity to an Italian American subculture.

Kinesics

Unless completely neutered by an Anglo dominated hierarchy, the Italian American female and male are usually easily recognizable as members of a particular cultural minority by their use of hands, gestures, movements and facial expressions. These gestures or movements are used to augment, to point, to replace words or to illustrate---in other words, to communicate. These message systems may be used with verbal symbols or alone, in which case, the sign or gesture becomes the symbol. The meanings are generally agreed upon and accepted by members of the Italian American community.

In recent times, some gestures, once uniquely Italian American, have

been taken over and used by other ethnics. For example, the thumb gesture, seen in old Cecil B. DeMille films, signifies approval or rejection. The greater number of times the thumb is pointed down or up, the greater is the acceptance or rejection. The raising of the middle finger to one's adversary is a sign which enjoys universal usage. It carries the message---"Up Yours" and is understood by most people. A third gesture---"Manu Pantea" in which the index and middle fingers are held up and spread apart---has been traced to Roman time when it was used to describe a wise man, teacher or judge.(5) Later, in Christian times, it became the benediction sign. During World War II, it signaled "V" for victory. Then, in the 1960's it became the peace sign.

Despite acceptance, usage and understanding of some signs and gestures, it has not been an easy task to retain gestures unique to the Italian American. Most Italian Americans will testify to the embarrassment and the indignity felt when an Anglo teacher or nun would threaten to tie their hands to determine if it were possible to speak without them. So, intimidated by those bastions of Anglo ethnic culture, the students stood rigid with their hands stuck to their bodies as though "Krazy Glue," not nervous perspiration, poured from the palms. Yet, few, if any, felt obligated to transfer this restriction of movement outside the classroom. When the students returned to their peers and to the Italian American environs, they merely switched cultural channels and the hands danced again.

Ruesch and Kees state that each subculture has developed "systems of communication in which particular words, gestures and signs have been assigned communicative significance."(6) The following observations shall concentrate on gestures and signs, describe these movements, and give the "communicative significance" of the most frequently used signs and gestures.

A. Finger Movements

Meanings

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Tapping the temple with the index finger. | "I'm no fool."
Intelligence |
| 2. Screwing movement of the index finger at the temple. | Foolish/Crazy |
| 3. Pointing with the index finger. | Emphasis
"Pass that, please." |
| 4. Rubbing of the index finger and the thumb. | Money/Wealth |
| 5. Bent forefinger placed between the teeth. The knuckle is bitten. | Curse/Extreme Anger
"May you bleed to death!" |
| 6. Fingers extended stiffly, thumb placed under, knuckle or forefinger is bitten. | Curse/Extreme Anger |
| 7. Moving index finger side to side. | Negative Reply |
| 8. Violent downward movement of index finger. (Accompanied with verbal "No!") | Strong Rejection |
| 9. Index finger and thumb parallel but separated about one inch. | Small/Tiny |
| 10. Index finger and small finger extended, other fingers and thumb are kept in palm. Position of hand determines meaning. | |
| a. Hand held with palm facing person, fingers pointed toward person. | "Malocchio"
Evil Eye |
| b. Hand held with palm facing person. (Gesture at forehead) | Cuckold |

11. Index fingers and thumbs of both hands form a circle. Other fingers and thumbs are bent inward. Circle opened or closed to indicate size.

a. Gesture made at mouth or head.

Outspoken Person/Gossip

b. Gesture made below the waist.

Size of the female sexual organ. Meaning: "She has a lot of nerve."

12. Fingers bent, thumb held up, brought to lips and kissed. Variation: Both thumbs are kissed.

Seal a Promise

"On my dead mother's soul."

B. Hand Movements

Meaning

1. Hand up, palm facing person, fingers slightly apart, arm slightly bent.

"Stop."

"Don't say more!"

2. Hand with palm facing the ground, fingers apart, arm slightly bent. Rocking movement.

"So, so."

3. Hand cupped over male's genital area. Rubbing movements.

Mild Disagreement:

"You're wrong".

Contempt/Extreme Anger

A Sexual Invitation

4. Both hands placed on upper thighs of the female. Pulling apart movement.

Contempt/Extreme Anger

A Sexual Invitation

(Movement 3 and 4 are usually directed toward the person to whom one is speaking by thrusting the hips forward.)

5. Hand rubbing.

"That's finished."

6. Hand, with fingers spread, twisted toward palm of the hand. Circling movement.

Thief

Stolen Object

7. Fingers bent toward palm, hand brushed under the chin, fingers extended, palm of hand up.	"Eh!" "What's new?" "Nothing."
8. Hands with fingers apart, palms up, arms bent, extended upward. Back and forth movements.	"God, help me." "What do I do now?"
9. Hands with fingers apart, placed on chest.	"I swear it!"
10. Hands, fingers apart, palms turned toward body. Up and down movements.	"Are you going to get it!"
11. Movement #10 with violent and repeated shaking movements.	Extreme Rejection
12. Hand with fingers touching thumb, pointed upward. A jerking motion.	"What did you say?" "Hey!" (Stop)
<u>C. Arm Movements</u>	<u>Meanings</u>
1. Arms extended in front of body, palms placed facing each other. Shaking motion. Space between hands increases as size does.	Size of Objects (Including male's sexual organs)
2. Right arm with closed fist extended, left arm crosses chest, left hand hits the right bicep violently, the right arm springs upward.	"Up yours!" Violent Rejection Curse
<u>D. Shoulder Movements</u>	<u>Meanings</u>
1. Shoulders shrugged and held in position, arms bent, hands, with fingers apart, facing each other	"Stop!" "It hurts!"
2. Shoulders held high, arms bent, hands, with fingers spread, palms face upward. (Eyes directed upward).	"Only God knows." "Who knows?"

E. Head MovementsMeaning

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Pointing with chin. | "What's that?"
"Pass that, please." |
| 2. Head raised up. Sudden jerking motion. | "What happened?" |

F. Body Movements

(The following movements are predominant among Italian American women.)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Rocking movement of body, hands extended in praying position, moved up and down. (Sitting position) | Embarrassment/Shame |
| 2. Rocking movement of body hands clapped continuously, eyes directed upward. Sometimes with verbal: "Se Dio vuole." (Sitting or Standing Position) | Grief/Plea
"Why has God forsaken me?" |
| 3. Rocking movement of body, hands joined and held in lap or arms crossed against the chest. (Sitting or Standing Position) | "It was God's will."
Grief |

Haptics

Touch, the most basic form of communication, is more pronounced in the Italian American ethnic group than in the Anglo. The female and the male relate to their friends, family and peers through spontaneous physical demonstrations of affection and love. Touch is used to augment or emphasize verbal symbols, to get and keep one's attention, and to greet people. It may be used for reassurance and security. At times, touch combined with verbal symbols is used to heal.

While discussing confidential or important matters, the male will touch the shoulder of another male. He will place his hand on a listener's knee to stress a point or to get and keep attention. Male friends, in camaraderie, will pat the derriere, squeeze the chest nipple or poke the rib of each other. When males meet, they will shake hands with strangers and acquaintances but will shake hands and touch the upper arm or shoulder of relatives or friends. The young Italian American boy or male will be expected to embrace and kiss older female and male relatives at greetings and farewells. However, among adult males, embracing is restricted to situations of great happiness--- weddings, births, reunions, etc. ---and to situations of great grief---deaths, wakes and funerals. And after a period of a long absence, a son will embrace his father. Kissing on the lips between males is seldom seen except in Hollywood films which show a "mafioso" bestow the "Kiss of Death" on his intended victim.

Among Italian American females, embracing and pressing cheeks is used in greetings and farewells. Arm squeezing is used to emphasize a point or to get and keep one's attention. The Italian American female seldom will poke or touch another female on the breast or the knee. Like her young male

counterpart, the Italian American girl is expected to embrace and to kiss older female and male family members.

Touch is used to heal physical and mental anguish. In times of great sorrow, one will embrace and hold the person allowing the body warmth to flow freely from her/his body to that of the bereaved. Few, if any, words are spoken for they are not needed since paracommunication is present.

Touch combined with words is used by older Italian American women to heal physical pain. The woman will place her thumb and index finger at the nose bridge of the afflicted and recite:

Occhio, malocchio, esci, malocchio!

Cristo é nato prima del malocchio.

Credo in tre persone divine e in un solo Dio!

"Eye, evil eye, leave!

Christ was born before you.

I believe in the Holy Trinity

and in only one God!"

Proxemics: Space

Interiors of Homes: For over thirty years, a close family friend kept every piece of living room furniture covered with sheets. For happenings (e.g., birthdays, communions, weddings, deaths, etc.), she would remove the covers. Even though they were removed, the guest seldom lingered in the formal living room except to pause, admire and remark, "What a lovely room," or "How do you manage to keep your things so nice?"

Today, there are few sheet-covered living room suites; however, in most Italian American homes, the living room is still wasted space. It is an area through which one processes people to actual living space---a den, a family room, a dining room or a basement. Yet much time and money are spent on the living room's furnishings and decorations which many times have a common theme---reference to the past, either European or American Colonial.

For the Renwick Gallery in Washington (a branch of the Smithsonian) Venturi and Rauch reproduced the front facades of several row houses of Second Street in South Philadelphia -a heavily populated Italian American area- and recreated one living room. The furnishings and decorations of this room reflected the owners' taste for formal styles from various periods. One wall was covered with foot-square mirror tiles. The color television, in an Italian Renaissance credenza, had trophies, photos, and a Venice glass candy dish. Wall-to-wall carpeting, flocked wall paper, Regency sofa and chairs, Georgian drapery, glass top cocktail table, 19th-century end tables, and a lamp suspended from the ceiling by a golden chain were all in the Venturi and Rauch living room reconstructed for this exhibit and entitled: "The Row House Room."(7)

The exhibition presented a faithful reproduction of many urban Italian

American homes; however, from this writer's observations, the re-creation was specifically representative of the houses of the over-40 owners. The younger Italian Americans, in city apartments and suburban homes, are more likely to furnish and decorate their homes in modern and contemporary styles. The wall-to-wall shag rug, the leather couch or love seat, the Parson or glass top tables, the ginger jar or chrome lamp, the many plants and one wall with a geometric patterned wallpaper are found in the homes of the under-40 house and apartment dwellers.

Regardless of the types or styles of furnishings and decorations, the living room area is seldom used by the over or under forty owners. The Italian Americans prefer to sit around the dining room table, on the porch or balcony swing, or outside at poolside, in the wicker or recliner chair in the family room. The living room is required by tradition and by ties with a European heritage and arranged to display the owner's taste, objects and status.

Exterior of Homes: The Italian American takes pride in her/his home. A walk through an Italian American neighborhood, whether it be filled with Federal Hill's wooden tenement houses, Boston's brick buildings or South Philadelphia's row houses, will reveal recently painted or remodeled buildings. Each house, although similar in style or design, will have a unique quality about it (e.g., color, door, flower pots, grilles, plants, window shutters).

There is friendly competitive spirit in Italian American neighborhoods. A resident buys a plaster statue and her/his neighbors find a larger one. One neighbor hangs a potted plant and her/his neighbor puts up two planters.

This friendly competition can best be illustrated by a "Nonna" (grandmother) story. Our family has lived next door to the rectory for years, and

the priest, at Nonna's invitation, would often cut through the hedges to sample the wine of a newly opened barrel or to taste some freshly baked pastry. One day, the church pastor remarked that his yard looked so much better with the recently planted red maple trees. Nonna soon had her gardener place a red maple tree in her yard. The pastor said, "Ah, Signora, you've had a tree planted. It's nice."

Nonna shrugged her shoulders, brushed her hand under her chin and replied, "Eh!"

"But, you know, Signora, my trees will grow taller than yours for I blessed them," said the Pastor.

Nonna smiled, leaned back, raised her eyes to the heavens and answered, "My tree grow tall too. I bless 'eet.' I 'pees' on 'eet'."

Spatial Arrangements: At a wedding dinner or reception, one can surmise the degree of interaction and of relationship between the guests and the newlyweds by the proximity and the position of the guests to the wedding party.* The wedding party table, facing the guests, will have the newlyweds, maids and ushers, parents, grandparents, and, if invited, a priest. The bride's family will be seated to her right; the groom's family will be seated to his left. Nuclear and extended family members will be arranged in prominent focal positions to show their relationship to the newlyweds, and, of course, to display their wedding finery.

*Ten to fifteen years ago, the wedding invitation itself served to reveal the relationship of a guest to the newlyweds. Close family members and friends would be invited to the wedding ceremony, the breakfast, the cocktail hour or reception, and the wedding dinner. Other guests would be invited only to the ceremony and dinner; their envelopes did not contain small engraved cards for breakfast or cocktails.

Spatial positioning is predetermined by tradition and is fairly simple---the closer the blood relationship, the closer one is seated to the bride and groom. However, very complicated arrangements must be made when there is an intrafamily feud, or if the parents are separated, or if one parent is not alive, or if a parent has re-married. The bride-to-be and her family will face the seating chart and position and re-position people as generals of another era planned strategy for the battle. This will be subject to the approval of the groom. At the wedding dinner, the success of these maneuvers is determined by the lack of tears shed or of curses sworn in cocktail lounges or bathrooms, for the Italian American, emotional and extremely family oriented and status conscious, is hurt and slighted easily if she/he feels an assigned position demeans one's status or family relationship.

At a wake, all seats have an unobstructed view of the casket---the focal point. To the right of the casket, the survivors will be positioned according to their relationship to the deceased and according to their age. A hierarchy with members of the nuclear family in prominent positions and with members of the extended family in secondary positions will be established. A mourner may pass a member in a secondary position and not express her/his condolences. However, she/he would never pass anyone in the primary position. If the mourner is not acquainted with the primary position people, someone will leave his/her place to make introductions.

Spatial positioning at the funeral also reveals one's relationship to the deceased. Friends and family will assemble at the funeral home where names and license plate numbers are taken by the funeral director. The first to leave the funeral home and to assume final positions in the funeral procession are acquaintances and business associates. The nuclear family

members will leave last to take front or primary positions in limousines and cars directly behind the hearse, flower cars and pallbearers' car.

Objectics: Photographs

In the Italian American ethnicity, people, happenings, and occasions are recorded on film. Birthdays, school dances, weddings, communions, confirmations, graduations and anniversaries are captured in photographs, placed in ornate or formal frames and displayed. Italian Americans enjoy having their pictures taken and taking pictures to record an event or occasion, an, if--- God forbid,---a family member should die, to have readily available a recent photograph for the obituary page.

Perhaps one of the most extensive and expensive pictorial records is the one documenting the Italian American wedding day. There are few newlyweds and parents who do not have a wedding album done by a professional photographer---the more prestigious the studio, the higher the fees. The cover of the newlyweds' album will read: "Our Wedding Day"; their parents' cover will read: "Our Children's Wedding Day." The album covers vary from wood or leather to paper or "genuine imitation leather" and since most albums are white, a vinyl material to prevent soiling is placed over them.

The title page, made of linen or parchment for the more expensive books, contains the date and the place of the wedding, the names of the groom, the bride, the maid or matron of honor, the best man, the priest and the attendants (e.g., maids, ushers, flower girls and/or ring bearers).

The photographer determines the sequence of pictures, and the first picture shows the bride-to-be, fully gowned, at home. For some reason, most photographers start with the bride-to-be and her image reflected by a mirror in her bedroom. Then follow photographs of the bride-to-be, in various rooms and various poses, by herself, with her parents and her maids. The final

picture in the "at home" sequence shows the bride-to-be and her parents, grandparents, (if alive) and her maids in front of the family home. This serves to remind the bride-to-be of who she is, what she is, and where she comes from. Although the woman will assume another's surname, for few Italian American women retain their family name as the Puerto Rican or Spanish woman does, her family ties are every bit as permanent. Future studies of the reactions of the Italian American father and the Italian American groom if the woman retains her family surname, as suggested by many women's groups, should be interesting.

The second sequence, "outside the church," will show the bride-to-be and her father leaving the limousine, the bride-to-be and her maids lining up and the bridal party entering the church. The first two sequences have been devoted to the bride-to-be, and, unless the photographer arrives at the church before the bridal party and takes pictures of the groom-to-be, there will be no pictures of the groom-to-be until the third sequence. Although most Americans realize a groom is necessary for a wedding, it is the bride on whom attention and care are showered.

In the Italian American family, the son, who may be totally dependent on his parents for love, affection and financial support, is considered a "man." (Meaning: He can not get pregnant no matter how stupid he is or how hard he tries.)

The daughter is a "woman" who must be protected from her own passionate nature and who must be cared for. She will go to private schools, attend health spas, shop and vacation in Europe, buy a Shin Tzu or a Lhasu Apso, have her Roman nose shortened or have her Tuscan nose slimmed. In its way, the Italian American ethnic group has created its own "Frankenstein" who

competes with the WASP and the Jewish American princesses in the practice of self-indulgence and of professional virginity. Most parents are sad to lose their princess but also relieved to have the groom assume responsibility for her.

The third sequence of photographs serves as a record of the marriage ceremony. These pictures show the bridal party walking down the aisle, the father giving the daughter to the groom, the bride and groom exchanging vows and rings, and the wedding party leaving the church.

The next sequence challenges the imagination and the artistry of the photographer. The wedding party is carried off to formal gardens, parks, public buildings, or to the studio and posed in front of floral arrangements, or on the marble stairs of a public building, in a wooden gazebo, on a Japanese bridge, or in a heart-shaped frame. "Romance" is the key term for this sequence.

Up to this point, the newlyweds, the bride's parents and the attendants have been the only ones photographed for the album. It is the last sequence,---"wedding dinner"---which shows the groom's parents and family and the wedding guests. Both the wedding party and photographer are tired, which may be the reason for the inclusion of other people. This sequence depicts the best man giving the toast; the bride (assisted by the groom) cutting the wedding cake; ~~the bride~~, the bride feeding cake to her husband; the groom dancing with his mother-in-law; the bride dancing with her father; and other memorable scenes. The last series of photographs makes the giving of the bride to the groom part of the public record due to the presence of witnesses---the wedding guests.

The wedding album closes with a picture of the newlyweds in "going-away" clothes departing for their honeymoon. They are, of course, smiling and

holding hands, and, although one does not see the parents and guests, one surmises that these people are saying, "Bene, it is done."

This pictorial souvenir of the wedding day is first displayed prominently on a coffee or lamp table and made easily accessible to all. As time passes, it is placed in a drawer or closet and taken out on request. Of course, should the marriage end in divorce, the wedding album will be given to the bride's family, and some nimble-fingered mother-in-law will skillfully cut out all pictorial representations of the groom.

Objectics: Jewelry

The female and the male of the Italian American subculture enjoy adorning the body with artifacts, especially those marked "Made in Italy," "18K Gold," or "Sterling." The female over forty years old has had her ears pierced either at birth or at an early age. In the 1960's, ear piercing became an "in" thing, so the younger Italian American female joined her Anglo sisters, black and white, in the latest fashion trend. In the mid-1970's, fashion demanded not one but two or three holes per ear, and the Italian American followed the trend and added one or two holes in each pierced ear.

The extremely popular golden hoop earring has lost ground to the more contemporary ramshead earring. The older Italian American female will wear the hoop or the ramshead; however, she supplements her ear wardrobe with pearl, cameo and/or diamond earrings.

The Italian American male, unless he is a cycle aficionado, a follower of the gay lifestyle, or a rock or jazz musician, does not have his ears pierced.

Most Italian American women, regardless of age, will wear a gold chain with a cross, a religious medal, an astrological sign, or the single horn--- to ward off "II Malocchio," the "Evil Eye." The wearing of the horn is a

recent invasion into what was strictly a male adornment. The small gold fish charm was extremely popular in the 1960's; however, few are seen now. Since fashion dictates the wearing of chains, today's Italian American female competes with her Anglo sisters in the quantity and the quality of chains worn.

The Italian American male, once ridiculed by his Anglo brothers for the wearing of neck chains, and for many years a closet chain-wearer whose secret was discovered in college or Army shower rooms or at the beach, has now blantly undone the third shirt button to reveal and to expose his hairy chest and his body adornments.

The emblems or charms popular in the 60's and the early 70's were the scissors, the hunchback, or the sign of the cuckold---the two finger symbol. The male's neck chain now carries a religious medal,⁸ an astrological sign and/or the single horn.

Bead or turquoise necklace and the number, the razor blade, or the fist emblems are worn by Italian American females and males. However, these artifacts do not identify their wearers as Italian Americans but as fashion trend followers.

Both the female and the male adorn their fingers with rings. The female wears the diamond, the birthstone and the various popular silver or gold rings. The Italian American male is easily recognized by his preference for the diamond, the initial and the pinky rings. Of course, the members of this group keep pace with their Anglo peers in the purchasing and the wearing of the latest fashions in watches and bracelets.

Bracelets, however, have never been too popular with the Italian American male, and, except for the occasional wearing of the turquoise or the identification bracelet, the wearing of bracelets was abandoned by most in the early 1970's. This phenomenon may be the result of stories circulated

by grandfathers or fathers concerning the masculinity of Valentino after he exhibited his gold slave bracelet and/or to the extreme popularity of bracelets among members of the gay community. Regardless of the reason one accepts, the preservation of the masculine image is paramount to the Italian American male's sexual identity.

Objectics: Money

For many years, mourners at Italian American wakes "put a place," a contribution to defray funeral and burial expenses. The donor's name, address and the amount of the "place" were recorded on lists, so that an equal amount could be made at the time of the donor's wake. In the late 1970's, more affluent and Anglicized Italian Americans did not take "places" at their family wakes. However, they realize that most Italian Americans are tradition-bound and have fixed patterns of behavior; therefore, they substitute the "place" with a request for spiritual bouquets, Memorial Masses dedicated to the dead, or for contributions to a specific charity. Many Italian Americans reveal their economic and social status and their generation when, at a wake, they ask if "places" are being taken.

Italian Americans give money on special and on non-special occasions. There are few members of the Italian American ethnic group who can not remember the excitement of receiving a silver dollar or a folded bill at Palm Sunday, Easter, Christmas, graduations, visits, birthdays and New Year's Day from a "Nonna," "Aunt Mary," or "Uncle Nick."

Money-giving also insured the Italian American bride of being one of life's newlyweds who would not receive two electric frying pans, three silver pickle servers, or two sets of demi-tasse cups. A very lovely decorated box or basket is in prominent view at the wedding reception. Into this container are placed money-filled wedding cards. In exchange for the money, each guest

receives a handshake from the groom, a kiss from the bride and a cigar and/or a piece of wedding cake.

Even members of the nuclear family will give money to the newlyweds. However, if for some reason the groom is not fully accepted or trusted, an appliance---stove, refrigerator, washer and dryer---will be given. The rationale is that the groom will not get his hands on the money of the bride's family and that the bride has an appliance if a divorce or separation occurs in the future.

And usually, if an "Aunt Amelia" sends a piece of Murano glass instead of money, the newlyweds know that something provoked this impersonal act.

The giving of money, therefore, symbolizes approval in the Italian American ethnic group.

Conclusion

By its distinctive functioning on the nonverbal level, the Italian American has identified itself as a separate subculture. The linguistic symbols of its origins are no longer utilized by the Italian American. The linguistic communication system has been lost, but the nonverbal has been kept. The main question generated by this study is: Will the subculture continue to retain a discrete symbol system?

Today, most Italian Americans are second, third or fourth generation, with only a small percentage being foreign born. Like other immigrant groups---Swedish, German, French, Chinese, Greek---the Italian slowly accepted the North American linguistic symbol system. There was no bilingual education law or program to protect the language of the Italian. For survival---economic, educational and social---the Italian yielded his/her linguistic symbol system. English became the language of the subculture.

The Italian American identity was preserved through the non-linguistic systems available. Some systems have been taken over by the North American culture. For example, what were once "Italian" foods are now American foods---pizza, lasagna, salami, ravioli and parmesan cheese. And television commercials scream at the North American that Wednesday is the day for "Prince Spaghetti." The "Up Yours" gesture now has obtained almost universal meaning. The "Gucci" bag or shoe is a status symbol. The horn medal hangs on Italian American and non-Italian American necks. Frequently used Italian-derived words include "confetti," "motto," "lava," "dilettante," "pasta," "volcano," and "terra cotta."

As many verbal and nonverbal communication symbols have been assimilated by the North American and other cultures, will all the distinctive aspects of the Italian American subculture be either taken over or lost? Will "Joelle," "Mia," Jason," "Jennifer," "Brian," "Mindy," and "Elsaine,"^{*} be able to retain the nonverbal symbol system of the Italian American ethnic groups?

Talia Coppola Shire said: "Recently, I made my baby "pastina," the little letters, and I literally was remaking what my mother had given me. The Italian I am is the Italian who probably died 80 years ago, because the rituals my family holds onto belonged to my grandfather. We've held them like little sacred jewels, while Italy has evolved. We're pretty much frozen in that period which our grandfathers came. I think this may be common with Italian American families. You evolve as American, but your anchor is the Italian heritage."(9)

The Italian American may retain ethnicity only if she/he has an "anchor" in the Italian heritage.

* Popular names given to children by the under forty Italian American parents.

Notes

1. Edward J. Miranda, "The Italian American: Who, What, Where, When, Why," Identity Magazine January 1977, pp. 11-16.
2. Gary Null and Carl Stone, The Italian-Americans (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1976), p.4.
3. Null and Stone, p.8.
4. Frank E. X. Dance and Carl E. Larson, Speech Communication (N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972), p.125.
5. Julius Fast, The Body Language of Sex, Power and Aggression (N.Y.: M. Evans, Co., 1977), pp 53-55.
6. J. Ruesch and W. Kees, Nonverbal Communication. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 192.
7. Jim Quinn, "Learning From Our Living Rooms," Philadelphia Magazine October 1976, pp 165-176.
8. Men prefer the "Mary" image over their name or patron saint image. The reasons for this preference are given in Ann Cornelison in Women of the Shadows (N.Y.: Little, Brown and Co., 1976): "Mary, the Earth-Mother image, can be loved, trusted and prayed to, while God and His son Jesus, remain cold symbols...Men find it hard to be humble before other men, even harder to lose face, so praying to a woman for her intercession is less abrasive to the ego." And this devotion to Mary has had universal effects. Luigi Barzini in The Italians (N.Y.: Bantam Books, Inc., 1964) writes: "It must be remembered that Italians were so attached to the cult of the Virgin Mary, so reluctant to neglect her, that they consented, also for her sake, that the unity of Christianity be dismembered by the Protestants who do not deem her worthy of so much attention."
9. Bill Wassirziener, "Talia Coppola Shire: A Profile," Identity Magazine March 1977, p. 61.